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A RUSSIAN VIEW OF THE CZAR*

There are Russians—reactionaries and moujiks—who see in the Czar the infallible representative, temporal and spiritual, of All-Wisdom and All-Virtue. There are fanatic revolutionists who trace his authority to a very different source. Russians are not lacking, however, who are able to keep control of their heads and hearts in the midst of the seething cauldron of hates and enthusiasms, to see things as they are and tell things as they see them. One of these is the author of the volume “The Czar and the Revolution” (which has recently appeared in German), Mereschkowskij, whom the German weekly, *Die Zukunft*, rather quaintly terms the “strongest culture-psychologist of New Russia.”

Russia is alone among important contemporary nations in the retention of the theocratic form of government in its primitive simplicity—God governing through an earthly representative who is at the same time king and priest. The Pope of the Occident long ago lost all the temporal power he ever possessed. The Pope of the Slavonic Orient holds the keys both of heaven and of earth; and in this two-fold authority lies a source of his strength—and of his weakness. Nicholas and the Greek Church must stand or fall together, because Nicholas *is* the Greek Church. He can repeat the arrogant epigram of Louis XIV, and give it a compound subject: *L'État et l'Église*.

Hence it follows that the Procurator of the Holy Synod and the corrupt clergy below him are unanimous in their support of the Czar and all his measures. Hence it is that the Slavophiles are seeking to free the Russian people from the yoke of temporal absolutism by breaking forever with the Greek Church. Hence it is that the “Westerners,” who look for salvation to the measures of Western Europe, and who see the Russia to-day where France was before 1789, are ready to force her to the step France has just taken—to separate Church and State com-

* *Der Zar und die Revolution*. R. Riper & Co., Munich.

pletely. The reformer in any country is likely to be something of a heretic ; the Russian reformer is almost inevitably so.

It is the double relation of the Czar to his people that renders it possible for him to promise reforms and withhold them without having broken his royal word. It is true that his recent assumptions of authority have flatly contradicted not merely his coronation oath, but very definitely-made later concessions, notably the edict of December, 1904. These concessions, however, were made by the temporal sovereign, and the spiritual ruler has never abated one whit of his authority. Constitutional absolutism, autocratic constitution ; the Czar is and remains an irresponsible despot, or he ceases to be Czar.

And who is this mighty and dreadful tyrant who affects to hold the lives and fortunes of a hundred million people at his disposal as completely as a South Sea Island chief of a few hundred? "The Czar is a good, uncertain sort of man ; he has no strength of will, and is absolutely unable to contradict anyone who holds an opinion different from his." The most ambitious and difficult position in the civilized world held by an amiable weakling ! The softness of his nature does not in any degree weaken his sense of the dignity of his calling ; and we have perhaps the most striking example possible of the world-old tragedy that results from the conflict of temperament and conviction.

He is genuinely anxious to help Russia and to help every Russian. He is willing to agree to any and every genuine reform, provided only—and there be those who maintain that this proviso is a prohibition—his power be not lessened. The anecdote is current in St. Petersburg that he has declared himself favorable to a constitution, if one can be framed which leaves him absolute autocrat !

His private life is beyond criticism. He is a kind father and a loving husband. There is something very charming in the unaffected friendliness of his manner. Before the terrible Japanese War let loose the hell-hounds without and set the different elements of the nation to tearing each other within, he lived for his family alone, dispatching necessary business in the forenoon with the conscientiousness of a nervous man, and walking, play-

ing and chatting with his wife, children and friends during the latter part of the day. As a private citizen, he would have been happy, loved and useful; as Czar he is the instrument of infinite misery, to himself and to Russia.

As befits the Head of a great Church, he is profoundly pious and unswervingly orthodox. His piety shows itself occasionally in forms that seem to the skeptical Occidental almost incredible — in forms of abject superstition. His earlier children were daughters, and it was not till after a journey to the tomb of the lately canonized Saint Seraphin of Sarow that a son was born to him. He is firmly convinced that the birth was due to his pious pilgrimage, and this event has drawn him closer than ever to the Church. He believes unquestioningly in the information furnished him by fortune tellers and dealers in the black arts, and various disreputable individuals of this persuasion find free entrance to the palace back stairs. The Secretary, Bezobrazow, a mystic who rose from an unimportant military position, and who is largely responsible for the disastrous war with Japan, owes his influence over the weak monarch principally to his religious enthusiasm.

Nicholas is frequently called false and double-tongued, and an official high in authority has denominated him a "Sly Byzantine." Such a reading of his character is utterly mistaken. He is not two-faced; he has no face at all. He takes his color from his surroundings, like a chameleon; and separated from his advisers he would have no doctrine but the rather vague one, when it is not given practical application, "The King can do no wrong."

The attempt to unite in one person Paul and Cæsar, Henry and Hildebrand, in these days of cosmopolitan civilization, is very unlikely to be completely successful; and were his crown not in danger, Nicholas the Emperor would perhaps not be so ostentatiously Nicholas the religious zealot. But a common danger has brought union. Absolutism and Orthodoxy, says Mereschkowskij, cannot stand one without the other; and his picture of existing conditions is so gloomy that well-wishers of Russia would scarcely desire that either stand.

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